

September 29, 2019

Title: Here to Serve

[Slide 1]

Text: Romans 12:3-8

Right Thinking

The boat that never sailed:

I remember reading a story about an elderly man who owned a beautiful sailboat on the Maine coast. He had sailed it for years when he was younger, but now was too frail to sail anymore. Nonetheless, he insisted on having the boat stored every winter in a boat yard, unwrapped and commissioned in the spring, and sailed up to the mooring in front of his mansion. Then, every day he would sit in his wheelchair on the porch of this house and look at his boat.

The boat was maintained in perfect condition all summer long, but never left the mooring until it was time to take it back to the boat yard for the winter.

What went so wrong that a sea-worthy yacht became a front yard ornament, never leaving its mooring? It certainly wasn't the boat's fault! It was all ready to sail. The problem was with the owner: He stopped *thinking* of his boat as a sailboat. It became a fetish, a memory of past glories, a pretty object. He spent thousands of dollars every year keeping the boat in pristine condition – so he could sit and look at it. Nothing more.

Paul's command:

The same thing can happen to you and me. We become what we *think*. We have the potential to sail far and wide on the wind of the Holy Spirit – but only if we see ourselves the way God sees us and think the way Jesus thinks!

Paul warns the Romans about the necessity of *right thinking* when he says:

[Slide 2]

Romans 12:3 NIV

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

J.B. Phillips paraphrases this verse this way:

[Slide 3]

Romans 12:3 J.B. Phillips

As your spiritual teacher I give this piece of advice to each of you. Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all.

God didn't make us to be lawn ornaments. He created us to do His work in the world. If we are going to do that work, we have to see ourselves the way He sees us. We have to allow Him to define our worth. We only discover our worth and purpose by putting our full trust in what Jesus has done for us. That is what Paul means by the "measure of faith."

Right Thinking:

Every one of us will struggle in one way or another to see ourselves the way God sees us. Some of us have an exalted opinion of ourselves and need a good dose of humility. We may be like the sailboat moored in front of the mansion – pretty to look at, full of potential, but going nowhere. To get off the mooring and start being what God made us to be, we need to think like Jesus.

On the other hand, some of us have low self-esteem. We never get out of the boatyard. We don't see how God would or could ever use us. We would prefer to stay out of sight. In its own way, this too is pride! We have decided that we alone are qualified to define our worth. Our challenge will be to truly *believe* that God knows better! And to do that we have to do *right thinking*.

Right Connection

One Body:

To illustrate what *right thinking* looks like, Paul uses the example of the human body:

[Slide 4]

Romans 12:4-5 NIV

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

One of the big challenges to thinking like Jesus is that we're all so different. We come from different backgrounds, we've lived different stories, we have different interests and aptitudes, strengths and weaknesses. We compare ourselves to those around us. And in a society that puts so much stress on the individual, bad thinking gets amplified pretty quickly.

What a difference it makes when we come to see that we are part of not just something bigger than ourselves, but part of Someone bigger than our whole world! We are "in Christ." That is our identity. All our differences fit together in Him, just like all of the different organs and tissues of our bodies share one DNA and form one unique organism.

Right thinking begins with understanding that in Christ we all belong to each other.

Here to Serve

Thinking to Action:

Right thinking results in right actions. When we see ourselves as part of the Body of Christ, we willingly use our God-given gifts to serve Him. Paul goes on to say:

[Slide 5]

Romans 12:6-8 NIV

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is

...serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Our differences don't divide us; instead, our various gifts complement each other just as the many organs of the body work together to make us healthy.

The person who hears from God and shares God's truth with others is not a "Lone Ranger." He or she prophesies for the good of the entire church. The same is true with serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading and showing mercy. None of us has all of the gifts. Only when we see ourselves as an essential part of something bigger than ourselves can we use them effectively.

The Jesus Mindset:

God has placed us here to serve – to serve Him and to serve each other. This is what it means to be a "living sacrifice." This is what it means to engage in *right thinking*. This is how a transformed mind works. We think and act like Jesus.

Paul sums up the *right thinking* when he writes to the Philippians:

[Slide 6]

Philippians 2:1-4 NIV

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

He uses the very same word for "thinking" or "being likeminded" that he uses in Romans. And he makes very much the same point: You're part of something, and Someone, bigger than you. Value others above you!

Here to Serve:

And that means that we are here to serve each other. Paul makes this point so powerfully as he goes on to say:

[Slide 7]

Philippians 2:6-8 NIV

*Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own
advantage;*

*rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*

*And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

If you want to know what a transformed mind and *right thinking* really look like, look no further. Jesus shows the way. He asks nothing of us that He hasn't already done Himself!

[Slide 8]

We're here to serve. Not to sit on a mooring to be admired. Not to see what we can get from others. Not to compare ourselves positively or negatively to other Christians. Not to just try to sneak through life with as little commitment as possible.

No! It's all hands on deck. Fire up the engine, cast off the mooring, raise the sails. The wind is up and there are places to go.

We're here to serve!